



# **NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS BOARD**

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**IN HONOR OF THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
SAN FRANCISCO BUILDING TRADES COUNCIL**

**Delivered by:**

**William B. Gould IV  
Chairman  
National Labor Relations Board**

**February 2, 1996  
Fairmont Hotel  
San Francisco, California**

**Thank you Stan Smith. Mayor Brown, Executive Vice President Chavez-Thompson, President Georgine, ladies and gentlemen. I am honored to speak here this evening, pleased to get back to my roots in the Bay area and see so many old friends from both labor and management, and to participate in this 100th anniversary of the San Francisco Construction and Building Trades Council.**

**The Council has a long and tumultuous history in San Francisco and in the annals of American trade unions. This is an evening to reflect upon an often glorious and sometimes uproarious past – and to celebrate one of the recent chapters in your story – the vital support that you gave to Mayor Brown in his historic election as Mayor of San Francisco in 1995. Heartiest congratulations to the Council, the labor movement and Mayor Brown!**

**In reflecting on the past, however, let me venture this estimate about labor-management relations here in San Francisco and elsewhere throughout the country in the future – the best is yet to come!**

**During the early part of this century the San Francisco Council was apparently unique among such organizations. Unique not only in terms of its strength in collective bargaining, but also in terms of the breadth of its involvement in community and political affairs and in its power to play a meaningful role in fulfillment of the vision held by its members and leaders.**

**The legendary Irishman P.H. McCarthy ran the Building Trades Council with an iron hand for 24 years and dominated the political scene in San Francisco for much of that period. In 1909 he was elected mayor, and he and his appointees from the Trades ran the city for a single tumultuous term until he was defeated by San Francisco shipping magnate and banker “Sunny Jim” Rolph. Other colorful figures from the heyday of the BTC included McCarthy’s house intellectual and visionary Norwegian, Olav Tveitmoe, who edited the Council’s newspaper, *Organized Labor*. Joe O’Sullivan, fresh off the boat from County Kerry in the twenties, terrorized strikebreakers with his infamous “Irish gang”. The vision of many of these colorful early BTC leaders went far beyond the more limited aims articulated by Samuel Gompers for the American Federation of Labor.**

**Michael Kazin’s book on the San Francisco Building Trades Council clearly shows that its leaders’ and members’ concerns ranged far beyond jobs and wages to encompass the spectrum of San Francisco political and civic affairs. This legacy is more important than ever today as so many of our basic rights and hard won gains are being debated in Washington and in state houses throughout the country.**

**The National Labor Relations Board recently celebrated its 60th anniversary and of the Wagner Act which established our Agency and guaranteed the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively over wages, hours and working conditions.**

In the words of Berkley's Professor Irving Bernstein, the Great Depression of the 1930s was a time of turmoil and trouble -- and an era in which the constitutionality of our Act and the existence of our Agency was challenged. Similarly, our 60th anniversary year was marked by conflict and change in the union movement, in labor-management relations and in our country's government. The New Deal programs of FDR, the New Frontier programs of JFK and the Great Society legislation of LBJ continue to be under siege in the 104th Congress. Our small agency has been swept up in the stormy dispute between the Clinton Administration and the Republicans in Congress over the federal budget and over the nature of the role of the federal government in our society -- and the new constitutional impasse between the executive and legislative branches.

The latest in a series of continuing resolutions providing funding for the federal government, which will expire on March 15, will permit us to discharge most of our basic responsibilities under the Act. And I want to thank representatives of both labor and management here in San Francisco and throughout the country for their support of the Agency throughout this difficult period. On behalf of the Board I thank our outstanding California representatives in Congress such as Diane Feinstein, Barbara Boxer, Nancy Pelosi, Tom Lantos, George Miller, Lynn Woolsey, Zoe Lofgren, and my own Congresswoman, Anna Eshoo and my Stanford colleague on the Republican side of the aisle, Tom Campbell. We are also grateful to the leaders of the relevant appropriations committees -- Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, Mark Hatfield of Oregon and John Porter of Illinois all of whom played an important leadership role in allowing us to continue with our work. We are grateful for and encouraged by this bi-partisan support.

The National Labor Relations Act has been judged by many knowledgeable and impartial observers to be one of the most effective legacies of the Roosevelt administration. The small agency never grew into a big bureaucracy and, in fact, has actually shrunk from a peak of nearly 3,000 employees in 1979 to its current level of about 1,950 through constant efforts to improve productivity. Over this period, cases handled per employee increased 29 percent.

As you may know we are operating under a stringent budget which makes investigation of our cases more difficult than ever -- and we are playing catch-up with the work that piled up during the four weeks the government was shutdown since last November.

We were forced to cancel and reschedule about 250 representation elections and 350 hearings in representation and unfair labor practice cases, affecting more than 40,000 employees, employers and unions across the country. Upon reopening the agency's offices on January 8, after the second shutdown, NLRB staff faced 720 new unfair labor practice charges and 120 representation case petitions that had been filed by mail during the shutdown which began on December 18 as a result of a

**funding lapse. We estimate that about \$8.8 million in nonrecoverable fixed costs including salaries and rent were expended during the second shutdown when more than 90 percent of Agency employees were furloughed.**

**All of this then is the stuff of law enforcement in labor-management relations. And I know that you understand what is at stake. The absence of orderly, straight-forward and prompt legal procedures would be a return to the bad old days of the preceding century before the creation of this great Council -- a period marked by divisive litigation over violent disputes in which most responsible segments of our society lost respect for law which is essential to a democratic society like ours. With 100 years of rich tradition, you know better than most how important it is to not repeat the past's mistakes.**

**In conclusion, on behalf of the National Labor Relations Board and the Clinton Administration, I extend our heartiest congratulations to the Construction and Building Trades Council of San Francisco. May your next 100 years be even more successful!**

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